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When the World Comes To a Halt, the Pursuit of Knowledge Endures

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By the time this issue of i.e. is published and in circulation, most people around the world will have spent more than two months in various forms of isolation to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The world has been impacted by this virus in ways that are still unknown and unfolding each day. Depending on your location, family situation and work-related status, the impact of the measures taken to slow the spread of the virus is varied. Of particular interest to purveyors of this journal, is the impact on the education community. Schools across the United States shuttered their doors in March 2020, and many will not reopen this academic year (with questionable status for Fall).

At National Louis University, our National College of Education is one of the leading institutions in Illinois preparing teachers for classrooms in Chicago Public Schools. The impact of school closures on our teacher candidates has been complicated, to say the least. Yet, as we have moved quickly to prepare our (now virtual) classes for Spring quarter, we have been heartened by the passion and dedication demonstrated by our students. Many faculty waited nervously as we watched our class lists prior to the start of the term – will they drop out? Will they be able to focus? Do they even want to be here during such an unprecedented time? Not only did the students come back, but they showed up with renewed hunger for scholarly interaction and an appetite for knowledge. It is a wonderful reminder of strength and resilience. Many things in our world have come a screeching halt, but the power to teach and to learn is enduring.

The rather large collection of 12 articles in this issue of i.e. also embody a thread of enduring commitment to education, inquiry and a quest for learning more. The articles presented cover a wide swath of topics from different countries and various disciplines – but all coalesce around the common objective to learn from the experience of students and educators.

Understanding educator perception is central to three of the articles in this issue. Durnali, Akbasli and Okan uncover teacher perception of organizational silence and administrators communication skills and the correlation between communication skills and organizational silence in “School Administrators’ Communication Skills as a Predictor of Organizational Silence.” Their finding related to the administrative communication and teachers organizational silence is a reminder of the how quality (or lack thereof) of administrative leadership in schools can significantly impact not only the quality of teaching, but the overall environment for educators.

Wang, Straubhaar and Ong’s article, “Teacher and Administrator Experiences with Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Support in a California Charter-led Turnaround School”, also explore perceptions related to the organizational structures of a school environment and its impact on retention and support. Findings from this qualitative study highlight key aspects that contribute to positive outcomes for teachers and overall school success, again demonstrating the importance of quality administrative support for teachers.

Alkan and Yazici look at teacher educator perceptions about the role education might play in ending terrorism, in “Teacher Educators’ Perceptions of Terrorism and the Role of Education”. This qualitative study of 30 Turkish teachers uncovers some thought-provoking findings related to the social/political context in Turkey and terrorism. Highlighting some surprising findings on teacher perceptions of education, the cultural context of this article is striking.

Examining different models of engaging students in the learning process is the focus of two articles in this issue. Project based learning (PBL) takes center stage in the following articles, presenting various methods in a range of learners from elementary school to higher education

Onlu, Abdusselam and Yilmaz tackle the more individual-level factors related to the learning process of undergraduate students participating in a project-based course in “Interaction between Group Work, Motivation and Instructional feedback in Project-Based Courses”. Findings suggest personal affect was direct related to the learning process, including group work and motivational variables.

Tuner, Hoffman, Breitfelder, Wolf, Metcalf, and Jones provide a unique look into the use of graphene as the central approach to the teaching of engineering and science in their article, “Graphene: An Adaptable Engineering Design Project”. The authors detail the uses of graphene through project based experiences and guided lessons, providing concrete information for educators to consider in their own classrooms. Pre and post surveys from students engaged in the project suggested an increase in content knowledge and lab skills.

Three articles in this issue focus on specifics of education in Turkey, from an investigation of a social inclusion program in an elementary school, math instruction in secondary schools, to an analysis of Islamic texts used in social studies.

In the article, “Investigation of the Effectiveness of the Social Interaction Program Applied to the Students in an Elementary School”, Sengun examines the effectiveness of an inclusive environment social integration program in 4th-grade elementary students in Turkey. Findings revealed positive effects on students’ social acceptance and increased perceived social support for students engaged in the program. Sengun provides some thoughtful discussion on the replicability of this program in different context.

Also from Turkey, Ozdemir examines how school principals conduct observations of teaching practices in teaching Turkish and math to middle school students in the article, “Principals as Instructional Leaders: Observation of Turkish and Math Instruction in Lower Secondary Schools in Turkey”. The qualitative research study focused on six principals in 12 secondary schools, concluding that principals should deepen their knowledge of content areas in order to support and encourage peer collaboration amongst teachers.

Deznis Tonga’s article, “Comparative Analysis of Values in Islamic Texts and Social Studies Education in Turkey”, identifies and compares the values intersecting the primary religious sources of Islam and the content of social studies education in Turkey. Summary of the analysis

suggest that learning about Islam from its authentic religious texts dispels misconceptions about the religion.

Two articles in this collection focus on issues of literacy. Laura Kelly presents a qualitative analysis of small-group book discussions with bilingual third-grade students in “Text Difficulty and Bilingual Students Interactions in Informational Book Discussions”. The study observed student interactions around informational books at their reading level and books one year ahead of their level. Analysis revealed interaction patterns in relation to text difficulty, suggesting text difficulty can produce different interactions from groups of students. There was no clear pattern of interactions suggesting more difficult text produced ‘better’ interactions, but supported the need to diversify texts to elicit varied interactions for bilingual students.

In “Meeting *Standards 2017?* A National Survey of Classroom Teacher Preparedness for Literacy Instruction”, Sharp, Robertson, Raymond, Piper, Piotrowski, Bender-Slack, and Young investigate how literacy teacher educators in the United States view classroom teacher preparedness for literacy instruction. Using a quantitative survey, results from the 205 respondent study reveals promising implications for literacy teacher education.

The two remaining articles in this issue consider adult learning through the process of professional development and learning. Nichlas Emmon’s article, “Developing a Continuing Education Program for Tribal Land Professionals” explores the process of developing continuing education for professionals working in tribal land offices across the United States. Arising out of discussions surrounding the need to professionalize careers in the tribal offices, Emmons details the pilot programs success and challenges, demonstrating a need for continued research on the learning outcomes for these programs.

Lastly, Solis and Gordon explored how three teachers experienced learning when engaged in ongoing reflective inquiry regarding their teaching beliefs and teaching behaviors in “Integrating Multiple Professional Learning Frameworks to Assist Teachers’ Reflective Inquiry”. Through case study analysis, the authors followed the teachers through their various learning frameworks. Findings suggest the teachers progressed through the inquiry process in different ways, but all three experienced cognitive dissonance that led to a commitment to align their beliefs and behaviors.

The articles in this issue of i.e. are diverse in their approach to the topic of education and inquiry, and it is this diversity that reminds us how varied pursuits of knowledge can help improve our understanding of learning, teaching and inquiry. Immersing oneself in the scholarly work of others can build our capacities and skills. And, during this time of great uncertainty in the world, our ability to give and receive knowledge transcends. When the halls of the school buildings are filled with the vibrant chatter of students again, we will be waiting for them, readied with more compassion and knowledge than ever before.

